



**NEW ENGLAND  
COMMON ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

**Student Practice Test Booklet**

**Grade 8**

**Reading**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_



# Reading—Session 1

Answer questions 1 and 2 on page 2.

Use the thesaurus entry below to answer the question.

**bad** *adj.*

1. awful 2. vicious 3. faulty 4. disobedient

- ❶ I tried to use the CD on my computer, but it was bad.

Which is the **best** meaning of bad as it is used in this sentence?

- A. meaning 1
- B. meaning 2
- C. meaning 3
- D. meaning 4

- ❷ In the words citizenship and friendship, what does the suffix *-ship* mean?

- A. a person
- B. a member of a group
- C. connected to
- D. state or quality of

*Porcupines are interesting, and often misunderstood, animals. Read this article and then answer the questions that follow.*

## **Porcupines**

*Frances N. Chrystie*

A porcupine prefers to remain unseen as it lumbers silently through the woods all through the year, both day and night, seeking vegetable food and enjoying porcupine ways. Unless you know how to look for the signs of a porcupine, you may have no idea that one is around. If you see a tree with bark gnawed off in a ring a foot or two off the ground, you can guess that a porcupine has been there, standing on hind legs and gnawing with its strong, orange, chisel-like teeth. If a rabbit had made the ring, it would be closer to the ground. Bits of bark and debris around the bottom of a tall maple or pine tree are another sign that a porcupine is resting on a high branch after a meal. With long claws on their front paws, these big rodents are good climbers, as much at home in a tree as on the ground.

Porcupines are protected by stiff quills, but there's no need to fear these gentle animals. There are as many as thirty thousand quills on an adult porcupine's back and tail, and each quill is needle-sharp, with microscopic barbs at the pointed end. If a quill sticks into your hand, it slips easily and painlessly out of the porcupine. Some people believe that porcupines can shoot their quills, but it only seems that way. When a porcupine lashes out with its quilled tail, only a slight touch is needed for the quills to stick the attacker; or when a porcupine shakes, loose quills may fly out, as a few loose hairs will when you shake your head.

A porcupine doesn't have to fight. It only has to stand its ground. Any animal that has tangled with a porc, even a bear or a mountain lion, will not be likely to attack again. Newborn porcupines know instinctively how to defend themselves. Startled by a noise, a porcupine whirls around with its back to the enemy and covers its face with its front paws. Its back muscles tighten, which raises the bed of quills and the long guard hairs that cover them, the way an angry cat raises the fur on its back. At the same time, the porcupine swings its quilled, clublike tail from side to side. If you're walking in the woods with your dog and you see a porcupine, call off the dog, because it may charge bravely to attack. A dog with a muzzelful of painful quills must have immediate help. Pull out the quills with great care so they don't break and leave the barbed ends in the nose, where they can become infected. You may have to take the dog to a veterinarian for help.

- 4 In spite of their prickly reputation, porcupines are fascinating animals that live solitary lives. In spring, after mating, the male goes on alone. About seven months later, the female has one baby (or, rarely, twins). It is born with its shiny black eyes wide open, its teeth in place, and tiny white quills under its black fur. The young porcupine drinks its mother's milk for several months but quickly begins to eat solid food. The mother calls to her little one in a high, singsongy voice, and the youngster waddles after her all summer, learning where to find roots, leaves, and delicious fruits. It may stay in a den with its mother during the first winter, but by the time it is a year old, the young porcupine is on its own.

**Answer questions 3 through 6 on page 2.**

- 3 The quills on a startled porcupine are compared to
- A. the muscles of an attacking mountain lion.
  - B. quills in the muzzle of an injured dog.
  - C. the look on the face of a surprised hiker.
  - D. the fur on the back of an angry cat.
- 4 In paragraph 4, the word reputation refers to
- A. the fact that porcupines have quills.
  - B. how porcupines are regarded.
  - C. the idea that porcupines live alone.
  - D. how porcupines defend themselves.
- 5 According to the article, porcupines can **best** be described as
- A. bold and fearless.
  - B. solitary and gentle.
  - C. observable and tame.
  - D. aggressive and hostile.
- 6 The author **most likely** wrote this article to
- A. explain the difficulty of studying porcupines.
  - B. entertain the reader with an amusing story.
  - C. inform the reader about a fascinating animal.
  - D. describe the habitat of porcupines.

**Answer question 7 on page 2.**

- 7 Explain why porcupines do not have to fight. Use information from the article to support your answer.

While mountain climbing, Rudi hears a voice from deep inside the ice and tries his best to help. Read this passage and then answer the questions that follow.

## A Boy and a Man

James Ramsey Ullman

The crevasse\* was about six feet wide at the top and narrowed gradually as it went down. But how deep it was Rudi could not tell. After a few feet the blue walls of ice curved away at a sharp slant, and what was below the curve was hidden from sight.

"Hello!" Rudi called.

"Hello—" A voice answered from the depths.

"How far down are you?"

"I'm not sure. About twenty feet, I'd guess."

"On the bottom?"

"No. I can't even see the bottom. I was lucky and hit a ledge."

The voice spoke in German, but with a strange accent. Whoever was down there, Rudi knew, it was not one of the men of the valley.

"Are you hurt?" he called.

"Nothing broken—no," said the voice. "Just shaken up some. And cold."

"How long have you been there?"

"About three hours."

Rudi looked up and down the crevasse. He was thinking desperately of what he could do.

"Do you have a rope?" asked the voice.

"No."

"How many of you are there?"

"Only me."

There was a silence. When the voice spoke again, it was still quiet and under strict control. "Then you'll have to get help," it said.

Rudi didn't answer. To get down to Kurtal would take at least two hours, and for a party to climb back up would take three. By that time it would be night, and the man would have been in the crevasse for eight hours. He would be frozen to death.

"No," said Rudi, "it would take too long."

"What else is there to do?"

Rudi's eyes moved over the ice-walls: almost vertical, smooth as glass. "Have you an ax?" he asked.

"No. I lost it when I fell. It dropped to the bottom."

"Have you tried to climb?"

"Yes. But I can't get a hold."

There was another silence. Rudi's lips tightened, and when he spoke again his voice was strained.

"I'll think of something," he cried. "I'll think of *something!*"

"Don't lose your head," the voice said. "The only way is to go down for help."

"But you'll—"

"Maybe. And maybe not. That's a chance we'll have to take."

**30** The voice was as quiet as ever. And, hearing it, Rudi was suddenly ashamed. Here was he, safe on the glacier's surface, showing fear and despair, while the one below, facing almost certain death, remained calm and controlled. Whoever it was down there, it was a real man. A brave man.

Rudi drew in a long, slow breath. With his climbing-staff he felt down along the smooth surface of the ice walls.

"Are you still there?" said the voice.

"Yes," he said.

"You had better go."

"Wait—"

Lying flat on the glacier, he leaned over the rim of the crevasse and lowered the staff as far as it would go. Its end came almost to the curve in the walls.

"Can you see it?" he asked.

"See what?" said the man.

Obviously he couldn't. Standing up, Rudi removed his jacket and tied it by one sleeve to the curved end of the staff. Then, holding the other end, he again lay prone and lowered his staff and jacket.

"Can you see it now?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man.

"How far above you is it?"

"About ten feet."

\*crevasse: a very deep crack in the ice

Again the staff came up. Rudi took off his shirt and tied one of its sleeves to the dangling sleeve of the jacket. This time, as he lay down, the ice bit, cold and rough, into his bare chest; but he scarcely noticed it. With his arms extended, all the shirt and half the jacket were out of sight beneath the curve in the crevasse.

"How near you now?" he called.

"Not far," said the voice.

"Can you reach it?"

"I'm trying."

There was the sound of scraping boot-nails; of labored breathing. But no pull on the shirtsleeve down below.

50 "I can't make it," said the voice. It was fainter than before.

"Wait," said Rudi.

For the third time he raised the staff. He took off his trousers. He tied a trouser-leg to the loose sleeve of the shirt. Then he pulled, one by one, at all the knots he had made: between staff and jacket, jacket and shirt, shirt and trousers. He pulled until the blood pounded in his head and the knots were as tight as his strength could make them. This done, he stepped back from the crevasse to the point where his toes had rested when he lay flat. With feet and hands he kicked and scraped the ice until he had made two holes. Then, lying down as before, he dug his toes deep into them. He was naked now, except for his shoes, stockings and underpants. The cold rose from the ice into his blood and bones. He lowered the staff and knotted clothes like a sort of crazy fishing line.

The trousers, the shirt and half of the jacket passed out of sight. He was leaning over as far as he could.

"Can you reach it now?" he called.

"Yes," the voice answered.

"All right. Come on."

"You won't be able to hold me. I'll pull you in."

"No you won't."

He braced himself. The pull came. His toes went taut in their ice-holds and his hands tightened on the staff until the knuckles showed white. Again he could hear a scraping sound below, and he knew that the man was clawing his boots against

the ice-wall, trying both to lever himself up and to take as much weight as possible off the improvised lifeline. But the wall obviously offered little help. Almost all his weight was on the lifeline. Suddenly there was a jerk, as one of the knots in the clothing slipped, and the staff was almost wrenched from Rudi's hands. But the knot held. And his hands held. He tried to call down, "All right?" but he had no breath for words. From below, the only sound was the scraping of boots on ice.

How long it went on Rudi could never have said. Perhaps only for a minute or so. But it seemed like hours. And then at last—at last—it happened. A hand came into view around the curve of the crevasse wall: a hand gripping the twisted fabric of his jacket, and then a second hand rising slowly above it. A head appeared. A pair of shoulders. A face was raised for an instant and then lowered. Again one hand moved slowly up past the other.

But Rudi no longer saw it, for now his eyes were shut tight with the strain. His teeth were clamped, the cords of his neck bulged, the muscles of his arm felt as if he were being drawn one by one from the bones that held them. He began to lose his footholds. He was being dragged forward. Desperately, frantically, he dug in with his feet, pressed his whole body down, as if he could make it part of the glacier. Though all but naked on the ice, he was pouring with sweat. Somehow he stopped the slipping. Somehow he held on. But now suddenly the strain was even worse, for the man had reached the lower end of the staff. The slight "give" of the stretched clothing was gone, and in its place was rigid deadweight on a length of wood. The climber was close now. But heavy. Indescribably heavy. Rudi's hands ached and burned, as if it were a rod of hot lead that they clung to. It was not a mere man he was holding, but a giant; or a block of granite. The pull was unendurable. The pain unendurable. He could hold on no longer. His hands were opening. It was all over.

And then it was over. The weight was gone. There was a scraping sound close beneath him; a hand on the rim of ice; a figure pulling itself up onto the lip of the crevasse. The man was beside Rudi, turning to him, staring at him.

"Why—you're just a boy!" he said in astonishment.

**Answer questions 8 through 11 on page 3.**

- 8 In paragraph 30, why does Rudi become ashamed?
- A. He realizes he has been thinking of himself.
  - B. He thinks he has done the wrong thing.
  - C. He realizes he knows the man.
  - D. He thinks the man's accent is strange.
- 9 In paragraph 50, why does the man's voice become fainter?
- A. He is happy to be rescued.
  - B. He thinks he is falling.
  - C. He wonders if he will get out alive.
  - D. He is not sure about his use of German.
- 10 The simile "the staff and knotted clothes like a sort of crazy fishing line" shows how
- A. thin the line is.
  - B. strange the line looks.
  - C. certain Rudi is about the line.
  - D. strong the line looks.
- 11 The word unendurable means not able to
- A. resist.
  - B. help.
  - C. avoid.
  - D. last.

**Answer question 12 on page 3.**

- 12 Explain how you know it was difficult for Rudi to rescue the man. Use information from the passage to support your answer.



**Answer questions 13 through 16 on page 4.**

- 13 Why does Rudi not see the man come out of the crevasse?
- A. He is afraid to look.
  - B. He is concentrating with his eyes shut.
  - C. He looks away in anxiety.
  - D. He cannot see because it is too dark.
- 14 Which information is **not** given in the passage?
- A. how wide the crevasse is
  - B. how the man got in the hole
  - C. how long it would take to reach town
  - D. how Rudi gets the man out
- 15 What is the **most likely** way this experience will change Rudi?
- A. He will never climb again.
  - B. He will be afraid of strangers.
  - C. He will become more self-confident.
  - D. He will seek out fame.
- 16 Which sentence **best** states the theme of the passage?
- A. Determination can accomplish amazing things.
  - B. Success is an important factor.
  - C. Life and nature are connected.
  - D. Humans should know that danger lurks everywhere.

**Answer question 17 on page 4.**

- 17 What are the problems Rudi faces in this passage? Explain how he solves each of them. Use information from the passage to support your answer.



# Acknowledgments

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